

**Commencement Address at the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis,
Maryland
May 27, 2022**

Hello, Naval Academy! Whoa.

Before I begin my speech, a thought crossed my mind as I was told the class of '72 is here. I was appointed to the Academy in 1965 by a Senator who I was running against in 1972. *[Laughter]* Never planned it that way. I wasn't old enough to be sworn in. I was only 29 years old when I was running. He was a fine man; his name was J. Caleb Boggs.

I didn't come to the Academy because I wanted to be a football star. And you had a guy named Staubach and Bellino here. *[Laughter]* So I went to Delaware.

But all kidding aside, the best line of the debate was—after it was all over, the announcer—the questioner, who was a good guy, but supported my opponent, who was a good man as well, I might add—and he said, "Senator Boggs, you have anything else you want to say?" And he said, "Yes, just one thing." And he took the microphone. He said, "You know, Joe, if you had accepted my commission to the Academy—my appointment to the Academy," he said, "you'd still have 1 year and 3 months Active Duty, and I'd have no problems right now." *[Laughter]*

So, the class of '72—*[laughter]*—welcome. You guys must be very proud of all you've seen and done.

Well, midshipmen, you made it! You made it! I'll bet there were times you wondered if you'd ever see this day—*[laughter]*—especially in those early days when you had to chop everywhere, memorize every Reef Point to make it through the Sea Trials, so—and even—even passing chemistry, for God's sake. *[Laughter]*

Well, this education has at times pushed the edge of what you thought would be possible in order to develop you morally, mentally, and physically. And it was worth it. It was worth it all because today you stand ready to assume the title you've been working toward for so long: ensign, the United States Navy; second lieutenant, the United States Marine Corps—members of the greatest fighting force in the history of the world. And that's no exaggeration. You have earned it. Congratulations.

I mean it, you really are. I've been in and out of Iraq and Afghanistan over 40—I think 38 times. My son spent a year in Iraq, won the Bronze Star, Conspicuous Service Medal. I lost him. But at any rate, I've seen you in action. This is the finest military—not a joke. We have the finest military in the history of the world.

And thank you, Admiral—Admiral Buck, for the work you and your team have done to put these young men and women in shape, when they arrived here 4 days *[years]** ago on I-Day, into officers of the Armed Services of the United States of America.

And, Secretary Del Toro, Admiral Gilday, General Berger, you know better than anyone how important this—these—the missions are that we're going to ask these young officers to carry out. And looking out at this field, it's clear to me we're going to be sending our finest.

* White House correction.

Congressman Ruppertsberger, it's great to see you here. I'm told you're here. I also want to recognize Congressman DesJarlais and—who—and Congressman Crowley, both here today as proud parents of commissioning midshipmen.

And by the way—and I know—you know that all midshipmen here are holding in their hearts the memory of two classmates who tragically did not live to see this day. I hope I'm pronouncing Duke's last name correctly—Carillo. And Michael Myles James.

Folks—midshipmen, this is your day. But I want to start by recognizing the people who got you here: your parents, your family—everyone here that shows their support to get you here, it's their day as well. So, midshipmen, stand up and clap for them. For them! I mean it. And, moms and dads and grandparents, thanks for instilling such honor and integrity in these young women and men.

Class of 2022, you've made incredible memories—please, have a seat—during your time in the Yard. After all, this class holds one of the fastest Herndon Climbs in history, upholding a tradition set by the "link in the chain"—class chain—50 years ago. This is a class that earned a record number of wins against the Army in the "N-Star" Competition. I hope my son up in heaven doesn't hear me saying that part. *[Laughter]* He's Army.

So many wins, you ran out of room on that flagpole, man. *[Laughter]* Look, this is the class of Midshipman Diego Fagot, who wasn't expecting that snap in this year's Army-Navy game. But once he got the ball, he knew what the hell to do with it, didn't he? *[Laughter]* You won the game. You won the game.

The class of Midshipman Sarah Skinner, the 54th Rhodes Scholar from the United States Naval Academy—54th—and led the women's rugby team to a national title. Stand up. I want you standing up. And now Sarah is on the Olympic development team. And I can't wait to see you, kid. I can't wait to see you.

When I couldn't play football anymore, I played rugby in law school. I should have spent more time in law school. *[Laughter]*

But at any rate, class of Midshipman First Class Andre Rascoe, Delta Company—your class president. I don't know, but somebody told me you may have questions for me. *[Laughter]* I think only the class understands that one.

You've all got so much to be proud of. You really do. *[Laughter]*

And by the way, once you're commissioned, remember: I'm your Commander in Chief. *[Laughter]* So don't ask me too tough a question, okay?

Look—and I know, unlike me, when I graduated from the University of Delaware—
Audience member. Woo!

The President. —I had a few—thank you—I had a few minor infractions, like hosing down an RA in a—anyway. *[Laughter]*

Unfortunately, this—we didn't have the same tradition you have here. So, before I take care of you, let's not forget: This is also the class that also got rowdy during the Air Force week in plebe year, and they're still trying to clean the chocolate syrup off the ceiling in King Hall. *[Laughter]*

You lived through "Red Beach Massacre." And that helped the printers "earn their jump wings." Anyone who wants to fess up to getting a printer onto the Chapel Dome, now's your moment. *[Laughter]* No one's going to admit it, huh? Okay.

Because as your Commander in Chief, in keeping with longstanding tradition, I hereby absolve all those serving restrictions for minor infractions. You are absolved.

And I—as I said, I wished all my graduation speakers would have been able to do that. [Laughter] You all think I'm kidding; I'm not. [Laughter]

Midshipmen, above all, the Academy has trained you to be leaders. Easy word to throw around, but hard to accomplish. You didn't take the easier route when you chose the Academy and again when you signed your "Two for Sevens."

You chose a life of service and purpose. You chose trial and sacrifice. You chose to be part of a mission that is greater than any individual.

While every class of midshipmen is tested, you faced added challenges to maintain a sense of mission and community and purpose when the global pandemic forced everything—literally everything—to change. When you were told not to return after spring break as "youngsters."

When in your second year you weren't allowed to see any other—anybody other than your roommate. Hope to hell you picked right. [Laughter] And when you had to take your classes over Joom—Zoom, I should say, sitting in your uniforms and mesh shorts. [Laughter] Oh, I figured that. [Laughter]

And then coming back to the Yard as Firsties not only to reform, but to remember what this place and what this time is supposed to be like; to return to the brigade to what it was pre-COVID and rebuild morale.

You had the responsibility to right the ship. And all of you stepped up, I'm told. You came together. You learned the first and most important lesson of leadership: to always, always care for your people, to respect everyone's talents, to be inclusive, and to make sure that the United States Navy and the United States Marine Corps draw from the full strength and diversity of this Nation. Everybody.

Midshipmen, for the rest of your careers, you're going to face challenges unforeseen. You're going to have to adapt and be ready to lead your people through whatever lies ahead. To state the obvious: No generation of graduates gets to pick what world they're going live—they're going to graduate into. It's already been formed for you. But you must change it.

No officer knows the range of challenges they'll face when they commission. And, class of 2022, you are graduating at an inflection point not only in American history, but in world history. And I mean it. The challenge we face and the choices we make are more consequential than ever.

Things are changing so rapidly that the next 10 years will be the decisive decade of this century, because they're going to shape what our world looks like and the values that will guide it not just for the immediate future, but for generations to come. And that is not hyperbole.

Over the past few years, we've seen how interconnected the world is. The deadly pandemic has impacted not just our own schooling, but almost every aspect of our lives: impacts of disruptions to the global supply chain causing significant inflation; accelerating the climate crisis that's leading to rising seas and more severe weather patterns around the globe.

And Putin's brutal, brutal war in Ukraine: Not only is he trying to take over Ukraine, he's literally trying to wipe out the culture and identity of the Ukrainian people, attacking schools, nurseries, hospitals, museums with no other purpose than to eliminate a culture. A direct assault on the fundamental tenets of rule-based international order.

That's what you're graduating into. This is a world in which ensigns and second lieutenants—a world that more than ever requires strong, principled, engaged American leadership; where America leads not only by the example of its power, but the power of its

example. Think of why most nations agreed to support us. It's the example—it's the example—we set.

And you'll learn to crew the most advanced ships in the world, train the most elite combat units, conduct undetected submarine missions, fly the most advanced fighter planes. But the most powerful tool that you'll wield is our unmatched network of global alliances and the strength of our partnerships, which, since I got elected, I've been trying to reestablish in detail.

Earlier this week, I returned from my first trip as President—been there before—as President though—to the Indo-Pacific, a region that will be vital to the future of our world. I met with the leaders of Japan—the heads of state of Japan, the Republic of Korea. I participated in a meeting of the Quad, which I restarted over China's objection, including Australia, Japan, India, and the United States: four leading democracies in the Indo-Pacific.

And I launched, together with 13 other countries across the region, the new Indo-Pacific Economic Framework to help write the rules of the road for the 21st century.

Before I departed Asia—before I left for Asia, I should say, I got a phone call from the Prime Minister of Sweden and the President of Finland: Could they come and see me in the Oval? They came to ask me whether I would support them joining NATO. The actions taken by Putin were an attempt to—to use my phrase—to "Findalize" all of Europe—make it all neutral. Instead, he "NATOized" all of Europe.

And all of this is illustrative of a foreign policy that is built around the power of working together with allies and partners to amplify our strength, to solve problems, to project our power beyond what we can do alone, and to preserve stability in an uncertain world.

This is the work that will be asked of you. This is not hyperbole. I'm being deadly earnest with you, because it will be. As sailors and marines, submariners and SEALs, Navy aviators and surface warfare officers, we're going to look to you to ensure the security of the American people, to build connections and strengthen interoperability of—with our allies and partners around the world.

You already started that work here at the Academy, where today we are graduating 12 international midshipmen, representing 10 countries, who will commission as officers in the militaries of their nations.

Graduates, you will be the symbol and the strength of your commitment to lead the world. You're going to stand sentinel, often shoulder to shoulder, with our allies and partners in critical regions of the world—like the service women and men I just visited in the Republic of Korea or the troops I spent time with in Poland in March who are making real our commitment to the security of our NATO allies.

In the Indo-Pacific, a maritime theater, [you]^{*} will be the leading edge of our response to natural or humanitarian disasters, showing people throughout the region the unmatched ability of the United States to be a force for good. You'll defend the international rules of the road and underwrite the future for the Indo-Pacific that is free and open, ensure freedom of navigation of the South China Sea and beyond and make sure the sea lanes remain open and secure.

These longstanding, basic maritime principles are the bedrock of a global economy and global stability. And you're going to help knit together our allies in Europe with our allies in the Indo-Pacific.

^{*} White House correction.

For the first time—if I can hesitate for a second here—did anybody think, when I called for sanctions against Russia, that in addition to NATO, that Australia, Japan, North [South] * Korea, some of the ASEAN countries, would stand up and support those sanctions? The world is moving so rapidly. I need not tell you aviators. Within the next decade, you're going to be able to circumvent the world in—within the atmosphere in a little less than—a little more than an hour. Things are changing.

And Putin's brutal assault on Ukraine has spurred a truly global response not just from Europe, but from Japan, Korea, Singapore, New Zealand, and more—standing with us to impose sanctions on Russia. Australia, sending military aid. Germany, for the first time, significantly upping their budget. Germany. Fiji, assisting the FBI in seizing the yacht of an oligarch.

We're seeing the world align not in terms of geography—East and West, Pacific and Atlantic—but in terms of values. We're living through a global struggle between autocracies and democracies. And I will note—and my—I've met more with Xi Jinping than any other world leader has. When he called me to congratulate me on election night, he said to me what he said many times before. He said: "Democracies cannot be sustained in the 21st century. Autocracies will run the world. Why? Things are changing so rapidly. Democracies require a consensus, and it takes time, and you don't have the time." Well, he's wrong.

Each of you, as you go out into the world, will not only be a proud member of the Armed Forces of the United States of America, you'll be representatives and defenders of our democracy. It sounds corny, but literally, our democracy. That's why you swear an oath not to me as your Commander in Chief or to any political leader, but to the Constitution.

Our Nation is placing in you great trust and great faith. A young man with me today, carrying in town the "football." All the responsibility given to so many of you, so consequential. Because you've chose—you've chosen the honorable path that few before you have done.

And you're going to look to uphold the honor of this institution and the generation of proud patriots who've passed this way before you. Patriots like a dear friend of mine, John McCain. John and I went after each other hammer and tong on the Senate floor. We disagreed politically on things. But being here, I can't help think of John and how the Naval Academy meant so much to him. He chose these grounds for his final resting place.

John was an American hero who withstood torture, years of being held as a prisoner of war. And when he came home, he decided to continue—he wanted to continue to serve. We traveled tens of thousands of miles together as he—staffing me as a Senator. I'm one of the reasons—and I used to always get kidded by my Democratic friends—I talked him into running.

He was a man of great principle and capacity. He always lived by a code, the same code that you all have been taught. It's not just words, it's real: duty, honor, loyalty. He kept that code throughout his years as a prisoner of war, all the time he served in the United States Congress. As I said, we often disagreed, but we were close friends. John and I, we knew one another.

In March of 2018, I was honored that John asked me—because he wasn't physically able—to come to the Naval Academy and receive on his behalf the Alumni Association's Distinguished Graduate Award and speak for him. Shortly after that, when John was on his deathbed in his home in Arizona, I went to see him.

I was leaving, after the visit, and in a voice barely above a whisper, he called me over to his bedside. He said, "Joe, will you do my eulogy?" I said, "Yes, John." And literally, at the same time, two guys who think they're hard-ass guys looked to one another and said, "I love you."

* White House correction.

Class of 2022, John McCain's memorial was one of the first experiences you had at the Academy back in 2018. Your class motto, "Not all of me shall die," I can't help but think must be a reflection—some reflection of that moment in your lives, a reminder of the responsibilities you have taken on and the legacy you will leave behind.

It's a promise, a promise you made to each other and to this institution, because what lives on will be the service you will give to others and the timeless principles that you're willing to sacrifice everything to defend.

In this moment, we must steer our Nation and our world through this decisive decade. I hope you'll keep the memory of the example of Academy graduates, like my friend John McCain, close in your hearts as you embark on your commissions.

I cannot promise you the way will be straight or the sailing will be easy, but I can promise you that you all have the tools needed to navigate any waters you encounter. This great academy has prepared you to face every challenge and overcome any obstacle. You are ready. For my wish to you is fair winds and following seas, because I know you will remain always faithful.

May God protect you all, and may He set you on your journey. And may God protect all those who wear the uniform of the United States of America.

Thank you. Thank you for your service.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:37 a.m. at the Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium. In his remarks, he referred to Roger Staubach, former quarterback, National Football League's Dallas Cowboys, in his former capacity as a quarterback for the U.S. Naval Academy football team; Vice Adm. Sean Buck, USN, Superintendent, U.S. Naval Academy; Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro; Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Michael Gilday, USN; Commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps Gen. David H. Berger, USMC; Rep. C.A. "Dutch" Ruppersberger, in his capacity as chairman of the U.S. Naval Academy Board of Visitors; Ryan DesJarlais, son of Rep. Scott E. DesJarlais; Cullen Crowley, son of former Rep. Joseph Crowley; President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia; Prime Minister Fumio Kishida of Japan; President Yoon Suk Yeol of South Korea; Prime Minister Anthony Albanese of Australia; Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India; Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson of Sweden; President Sauli Niinistö of Finland; Russian Federation Council member Suleiman Kerimov, whose yacht was seized on May 5 by Fijian law enforcement officials, in coordination with the U.S. Department of Justice; and President Xi Jinping of China.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, MD, commencement address.

Locations: Annapolis, MD.

Names: Albanese, Anthony; Andersson, Magdalena; Berger, David H.; Buck, Sean; Crowley, Cullen; Crowley, Joseph; Del Toro, Carlos; DesJarlais, Ryan; DesJarlais, Scott E.; Fagot, Diego; Gilday, Michael; Kerimov, Suleiman; Kishida, Fumio; Modi, Narendra; Niinistö, Sauli; Putin, Vladimir Vladimirovich; Rascoe, Andre; Ruppersberger, C.A. "Dutch"; Skinner, Sarah; Staubach, Roger; Xi Jinping; Yoon Suk Yeol.

Subjects: Armed Forces, U.S. : Military families; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Service and dedication; Asia : Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN); Asia : Indo-Pacific Economic Framework; Asia : Quadrilateral Security Dialogue; Australia : Prime Minister; China : President; Commerce, international : Asia-Pacific, regional trade promotion efforts; Commerce, international : Global supply chain disruptions, efforts to address; Defense, Department of : Joint Chiefs of Staff; Diseases : Coronavirus, domestic prevention efforts;

Environment : Climate change; Finland : President; Foreign policy, U.S. : Democratization; Foreign policy, U.S. : Diplomatic efforts, expansion; India : Prime Minister; Japan : Prime Minister; Maryland : President's visits; Maryland : U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis; Navy, Department of the : Secretary; Navy, Department of the : U.S. Marine Corps; Navy, Department of the : U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, MD; North Atlantic Treaty Organization; Russia : International and U.S. sanctions; Russia : President; Russia : Ukraine, airstrikes and invasion; South Korea : President; Sweden : Prime Minister; Ukraine : Russian airstrikes and invasion.

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